

# One Year Later: NIEHS Continues Response to Gulf Oil Spill

April 20, 2011 marks one year since the Deepwater Horizon explosion and oil spill occurred in the Gulf of Mexico. From its home base in North Carolina, the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS), has had a continuous presence in the Gulf region protecting the health and safety of workers responding to the oil spill, supporting Gulf region research efforts, and launching the GuLF STUDY, the largest study ever conducted on the possible health effects from an oil spill.

**Safety Training** – Within days of the explosion, staff from the NIEHS Worker Education & Training Program (WETP) were on site to ensure clean-up workers were trained to protect their own health and safety while responding to the disaster. Approximately 150,000 workers were trained using NIEHS-developed materials. A “lessons learned conference” will be held in Mobile, Alabama, May 4-5, 2011 to assess the training that occurred and identify ways to improve the health and safety of responders for future incidents. Many of the trained workers are now being invited to participate in the NIEHS- led GuLF STUDY.



**Toxicology Research** – NIEHS’ National Toxicology Program obtained samples of the Deepwater Horizon crude oil and dispersants and is conducting tests to better understand the chemistry, biological fate, and any potential toxicological effects.

**University-Community Partnerships** – The NIEHS is providing research grants to Gulf area universities that partner with communities affected by the oil spill. These research consortia will address health questions specifically identified by the community as a need.

**GuLF STUDY** – In June, 2010, the director of the National Institutes of Health Francis S. Collins, M.D., Ph.D., asked the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS), to lead a study on the health of the workers and volunteers most directly involved in responding to the oil spill crisis. NIEHS immediately began working with the Gulf communities, as well as agencies, researchers, and outside experts to design the study. Now, recruitment for the GuLF STUDY is underway in Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida to enroll 55,000 cleanup workers and volunteers. The long-term health study will help determine if oil spills and exposure to crude oil and dispersants affect physical and mental health.

